

# Febrile seizures

## What is a febrile seizure?

A febrile seizure is a fit or convulsion that occurs in children with a fever. The fever may not be obvious before the fit, as it usually comes on very quickly. This rapid change in temperature causes the seizure, not how high the temperature is.

Most fits last less than two minutes, but can range from a few seconds to up to 15 minutes. Your child may be drowsy after a fit.

Seizures usually happen in children aged from six months to six years of age. Febrile seizures are very common, about one in 30 children will have one.

## What causes a febrile seizure?

Febrile seizures happen when there is a sudden change in body temperature. The cause of the fever is usually a viral illness. Trying to treat the fever (such as by giving paracetamol) will not prevent a febrile seizure. Febrile seizures tend to run in families, although the reason for this is not known.

## What is fever?

Fever is the body's normal response to an infection and is usually harmless. For a child, this occurs when the body temperature reaches above 38°C.

If your child has a fever:

- Keep them cool by not overdressing them or having their room too hot
- Fanning or tepid sponging/bathing is not recommended for children with a fever as it may cause shivering and distress
- Give them plenty to drink (it is best to give small frequent drinks, or sips, of water)
- Give paracetamol (such as Panadol® or Dymadon®) or ibuprofen (such as Nurofen®) if your child has pain or is miserable
- Carefully check the label for the correct dose and make sure you are not giving your child any other products containing paracetamol or ibuprofen (such as some cough medicines and cold and flu preparations)
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen do not prevent febrile convulsions

## What are the symptoms?

A febrile seizure is very frightening for parents and caregivers. The signs and symptoms usually include:

- Loss of consciousness (a 'blackout')
- Twitching or jerking of arms and legs
- Difficulty breathing and/or foaming at the mouth
- Going pale or blue in colour
- The eyes rolling back so only the whites are visible

Your child may take up to 30 minutes to wake up properly afterwards. They may be irritable during this time and appear not to recognise you.

## What should I do if my child has a fit?

Stay calm and do not panic.

- Do NOT force or put anything into the child's mouth, including your fingers. Your child will not choke or swallow their tongue.
- Ensure your child is safe by placing them on the floor and removing any objects that could injure them
- Note the time the fit started and stopped, to tell the doctor
- Once the fit has stopped place your child on their side and make them comfortable
- Do NOT shake or slap your child to wake them
- Do NOT restrain your child
- Do NOT put your child in the bath to lower their temperature while they are having a seizure, or are drowsy following a seizure
- Take your child to your local doctor, health care professional or emergency department as soon as possible



If you are very worried call an ambulance (dial 000)

### What to expect

- Children suffer no pain or discomfort during a fit
- A febrile seizure is not epilepsy, and there is no increased risk of epilepsy in children who have had simple febrile seizures
- No regular medication is needed
- A short fit will not cause brain damage. Even a long fit almost never causes harm.
- Children who have febrile seizures normally grow up healthy and do not have any permanent damage from seizures
- One in three babies and children who have had one febrile seizure will have another. There is no way of predicting who will be affected or when this will happen.
- Children usually have fewer seizures as they get older, and most seizures stop completely by the age of six

### Seeking help

**Cabrini Emergency Department (ED)** is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

#### Seek urgent medical review if:

- **It is your child's first seizure**
- **The seizure lasts more than five minutes**
- **Your child does not wake up when the seizure stops**
- **Your child looks very sick when the seizure stops**

### Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Royal Children's Hospital website [www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo)
- Visit the Better Health Channel at [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)